

For Immediate Release

Contacts: Kirsten Seckler
Special Olympics
+1 (202) 715-1147
kseckler@specialolympics.org

**Special Olympics Announces “Spread the Word to End the Word 3.31.09”
A Youth-Led Campaign to Raise Awareness about the ‘R-word’**

Actor John C. McGinley Joins the Campaign

Washington, D.C., 9 March 2009 – Special Olympics announced today a new youth-lead effort - **Spread the Word to End the Word - 3.31.09**, encouraging people nationwide to pledge to stop using the derogatory word “retard.” The day will be devoted to educating and raising awareness about individuals with intellectual disabilities and the offensive use of the “R-word” in casual conversation. **Spread the Word to End the Word** is a collaborative promotion engaging Special Olympics leaders, celebrities, opinion leaders and the media.

Actor John C. McGinley, star of the hit television show “Scrubs,” and Ambassador of the National Down Syndrome Society, pledged his support for **Spread the Word to End the Word** after meeting with more than 130 young adults during a Special Olympics Global Youth Activation Summit in February held in conjunction with the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games. McGinley was inspired by the motivation, creativity and passion the youth demonstrated in helping raise awareness about this issue and their dedication to stop the casual use of the “R-word.”

“Most people don’t think of this word as the language of hate, but that’s exactly what it feels like to millions of people with intellectual disabilities, their families and friends,” said McGinley. McGinley appeared on The Bonnie Hunt Show and TV Guide Network promoting this endeavor and will continue to promote this issue.

McGinley added, “I choose to believe that most of us are fundamentally good and that we’re just not aware that the word is offensive and that it hurts.”

That is exactly the goal of **Spread the Word to End the Word** - promote awareness and initiate change. McGinley and young people want to change casual conversation and help eliminate the demeaning use of the R-word from today’s popular youth vernacular and replace it with a different r-word – “respect.”

Students and schools across the country will unite to challenge everyone to think before they speak. **Spread the Word to End the Word - 3.31.09** will follow a week of campaigning, mainly through viral media, posters and word-of-mouth encouraging everyone to pledge to stop the use of the word at www.r-word.org. Youth have set a goal to garner 100,000 online pledges through this campaign.

Special Olympics launched its activities and Web site www.r-word.org to eliminate the demeaning use of the R-word in today’s society in August 2008 when the film “Tropic Thunder” hit theatres. Special Olympics, along with a coalition of 17 disability organizations throughout the country including National Down Syndrome Society, American Association of People with Disabilities, The Arc of the United States and Best Buddies spoke out against the film, which featured the prominent use of the R-word.

As the father of Max, his eleven-year-old son with Down syndrome, John C. McGinley is committed to building awareness and acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities. He is currently serving in his seventh year as the national spokesperson for the National Down Syndrome Society's annual Buddy Walks, advocacy walks taking place in hundreds of cities across the United States and Canada in the fall.

To get involved or find out more information on **Spread the Word to End the Word – 3.31.09**, visit www.r-word.org.

About Special Olympics

Special Olympics is an international organization that changes lives by encouraging and empowering people with intellectual disabilities, promoting acceptance for all, and fostering communities of understanding and respect worldwide. Founded in 1968 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the Special Olympics movement has grown from a few hundred athletes to nearly 3 million athletes in over 180 countries in all regions of the world providing year round sports training, athletic competition and other related programs. Special Olympics now takes place everyday changing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities in places like China and from regions like the Middle East to the community playgrounds and ball fields in every small neighborhood's backyard. Special Olympics provides people with intellectual disabilities continuing opportunities to realize their potential, develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage and experience joy and friendship. Visit Special Olympics at www.specialolympics.org.

###